

It's time we talked: Pornography, young people and sexuality today

Parents: A new normal is here

Pornography is available like never before – access is easy, anonymous and free.

For young people today, technology is part of life. With laptops, smartphones, tablets, music and gaming devices, they can be online anywhere, anytime.

Technology opens up a whole range of exciting, creative possibilities for learning, connecting and creating – but it also means that pornography is more pervasive than ever before.

Example: Thirty per cent of all Internet traffic is porn-related.

Porn. It's everywhere. For many young people, it's harder to escape it than to watch it.

With the click of a button, young people can now access a vast array of free pornographic images via the internet.

Young people are being exposed to porn accidentally, as well as actively seeking it out. It's not so much a question of *if* they will see it, as *when*.

Porn's influence can be seen throughout popular culture – in music, films, television, fashion and advertising.

Example: More than 90 per cent of boys aged 13 to 16 have seen online porn – and that was before smartphones.

The nature of contemporary porn has changed – and it's very different from the centrefold of old.

With the evolution of technology and the growth of the porn industry, porn producers look for an angle that will sell – and what sells is much rougher and harder than ever before.

Acts of aggression – including gagging, choking and slapping – are commonplace in contemporary porn. Women's degradation and humiliation are also common themes.

Example: Eighty-eight per cent of porn scenes contain physical aggression. Ninety-four per cent of the aggression is directed at women.

The genie is out of the bottle, with pornography now the most significant sex educator for many young people.

A 'new normal' in pornography is here, and it's providing a disturbing model of sexuality for young people today.

In particular, the pornography industry is implying that porn's signature sex acts – ejaculation on faces and bodies, 'deep-throating' fellatio and anal sex – are 'normal'.

Example: Many young women report that their partners are initiating the signature sex acts from pornography.

As parents, families, schools and communities, we must start talking about porn with our young people.

Yes, this is territory that is tough to talk about.

But it's time we put aside our discomfort and discussed the issue as a matter of urgency, as pornography is impacting on the lives of many young people today.

Example: Some young men are genuinely surprised when their partner does not want or enjoy what they attempt to mimic from porn.

We can't let young people's sexuality be shaped by the pornography industry. We can do better than that.

Online porn is shaping many young people's sexual understandings and experiences – but what they are learning won't equip them for a sexuality that is respectful, mutual, consenting and safe.

We need to help young people navigate this new landscape – and equip them with the skills they will need.

Schools and parents can tackle these new challenges best by working together – for our children's wellbeing.

Example: Sexuality education has evolved – and it must now also address the powerful messages that pornography conveys.
